New York
Theatre Critics' Reviews
1944

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NEW YORK POST
NEW YORK TIMES
NEW YORK DAILY NEWS
NEW YORK NEWSPAPER PM
NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE
NEW YORK WORLD-TELEGRAM
NEW YORK JOURNAL-AMERICAN

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"Allah Be Praised"

Musical comedy with book and lyrics by George Marion, Jr.; music by Don Walker and Baldwin Bergersen; staging by Robert H. Gordon and Jack Small; dances by Jack Cole; settings by George Jenkins. Presented by Alfred Bloomingdale at the Adelphi Theatre, April 20, 1944.

NEW YORK POST
April 21, 1944

'Allah Be Praised!' at Adelphi Offers Another Side of Teheran

By JAMES ARONSON

WHEN the Messrs. Roosevelt, Churchhill and Stalin met in Teheran last year to plan a brave new world, they were innocently unaware that five years later some bored American ladies, looking for a bit of old world fun, would set up shop practically in the backyard of the house in which they met.

This old world fun was presented last night at the Adelphi Theatre, in the form of a big new musical comedy called "Allah Be Praised!" peopled by one of the pleasantest companies to be found on Broadway.

It Happened at Sultanbad

There's Mary Jane Walsh, out of Iowa; Patricia Morison from Hollywood; John Hoysradt of Groton and the Persian Room; Edward Roecker from St. Louis; Joey Faye, who received his doctorate in burlesque, and Milada Mladova (surprise!) from Oklahoma City. And lots more. They all assembled before some magnificent settings in the Emir's trappings at Sultanbad, sang and danced gracefully—and struggled valiantly to get out from between the covers of the book, a ponderous volume by George Marion Jr.

To follow the plot is neither wise nor profitable. It's enough to say that the American ladies have come to Persia in 1948 to "relax" with the Emir, who numbers in his harem several score beautiful girls whom he affectionately calls his "trainees." There are post-graduates, too.

The Two Best Songs

The music by Don Walker and Baldwin Bergersen is fair, and some of Mr. Marion's lyrics sprightly. Especially catchy is "What's New in New York," given out by Miss Walsh with all her flamboyant charm; and "Let's Go Too Far," which should be on somebody's hit parade before long.

But with all the company's good humor and talent, the spark and punch that could pick up the show is missing. John Hoysradt for one is given too little opportunity to let go. In his Emir's embroidery he is forced to play straight too much, and the lines weigh him down. When he put on a simple dinner jacket and did a bit as a night club pest, he brought the house down.

Miss Morison, beautiful and smartly gowned, didn't have too much to do but look beautiful and smartly gowned; but she did sing a few numbers pleasantly, alone and with Edward Roecker, who brings a good, clear, robust baritone to the Broadway stage.

The brightest light was Miss Walsh, who did well with a song called "Getting Oriental Over You," and in a burlesque of a Hollywood star. When she was on, the show perked up. There was some fine dancing by Milada Mladova, who is as pretty as her prancing; Pittman Corry, and Anita Alvarez, in a slow-motion baseball scene. Evelyne and Beatrice Kraft appeared in a clever satirical dance.

The chorus girls were very easy to look at and all seemed to be under six feet, for a change. The show's only exception in size is Jayne Manners, who contributed some rowdy fun with Joey Faye. Miss Manners is considerably over six feet, but extremely well proportioned every inch of the distance.

THE CAST

Caswell	Jack Atherton
Receptionist	Helen Bennett
Tex O'Carroll	Edward Roecker
Clerk	Sheila Bond
Citizen	Joey Faye
Abdul	Sid Stone
Bulbul	Jack Albertson
Carol O'Carroll	Mary Jane Walsh
Roberta	Marge Ellis
Paula	Lee Joyce
Doris	Mary McDonnell
Tubaga	Anita Alvarez
Emir	John Hoysradt
Zarah	Milada Mladova
Youssouf	Joey Faye
Nij O'Carroll	Pittman Corry
Dulcy Robot	Margie Jackson
Beatrice	Beatrice Kraft
Evelyne	Evelyne Kraft
Marcia Mason Moore	Patricia Morison
Mimi McSlump	Jayne Manners
Merchant	Tom Powers
Girls about Teheran	Eleanor Hall Louise Jarvis

NEW YORK TIMES
April 21, 1944

THE PLAY IN REVIEW
"Allah Be Praised"

By LEWIS NICHOLS

HAVING exhausted all the houses down by the Square, the legitimate theatre has been stretching out a beckoning hand, and last evening reclaimed the Adelphi, up on Fifty-fourth Street. Unfortunately, the good news of this morning's report probably must stop there. For the show which is bringing the Adelphi back to the land of the living is "Allah Be Praised," and the best that can be said is that it is second-rate. Its cast numbers several individuals of undoubted talent and/or charm, but no set of human beings in either New York or Persia could make anything but dullness from the book. As a musical show it is drearily slow.

* * *

No doubt the book is mainly at fault. George Marion Jr. is credited with its composition, and it is completely without wit. Having to do with an Emir's harem and a couple of visiting Congressmen, it is replete with gags about Lindy's, Broadway, Hollywood and other items culled from memory or wherever. In a discussion of finances, says one character: "How did you get such an odd figure?" Says the other, "I eat too much." In a discussion of natural history, says one character, "Is it a boy elephant or a girl elephant?" Says the other, "What difference can that possibly make?", etc. The rest of the jokes are dirty.

To stumble around through all this, "Allah Be Praised!" has invited the talents of Mary Jane Walsh, who can sing songs; John Hoysradt, a caricaturist of renown; Joey Faye, who under good circumstances can be quite funny; Milada Mladova, the dancer, and many others. Miss Walsh has some songs which are passable, Mr. Hoysradt has a few amusing moments, Mr. Faye is alomst embarrassingly without material, and Miss Mladova has very little to do. With a better book, or more time on the road working with the one it has, "Allah Be Praised!" could possibly have been brought into line, for the players appeared willing, and every now and then were moments which might have been developed.

Jack Cole has done the dances, which move briskly in the angular manner of Jack Cole, and as they perform them, the attractive chorus, Miss Mladova, Anita Alvarez, the Kraft Sisters and the rest are pleasant enough to watch. Miles White's costumes also are good. Don Walker and Baldwin Bergersen have contributed the music, with perhaps the best numbers being "Leaf in the Wind," "Let's Go Too Far," a jingley song called "Getting Oriental Over You," and "Katinka to Eva to Frances." This last, sung by Mr. Hoysradt, with a dance by Miss Alvarez, is O.K. or better. Miss Walsh does most of the singing, along with Edward Roecker, a new baritone, while Patricia Morison, on from the screen for a leading role, gives a number or so in a rather weak voice and without much emotion.

In short, "Allah Be Praised!" has the people for a good musical, and the costumes, dances and sets. Their misfortune is they simply are not in a good musical.

NEW YORK DAILY NEWS
April 21, 1944

'Allah Be Praised' Elaborate, but It Adds Up to Being Slow Persian

By JOHN CHAPMAN

MR. BLOOMINGDALE'S new musical, "Allah Be Praised," is big, as all musicals seem to be these days; it is cleverly and attractively set, as all such shows must be; its costumes and its girls are pretty—and it is on the dullish side too much of the time.

When Mary Jane Walsh is on stage to shoulder and bump her way through a song, it is lively enough, for Miss Walsh is a girl who gives. It is funny just once, when John Hoysradt does a sketch about the gay night club stew who talks through the torch singer's sad songs. It is amusing when a small gamine named Anita Alvarez is executing some unique dances.

It is close to fascinating when George Jenkins' sets smoothly change themselves without interrupting the show, and it has considerable charm when Milada Mladova is dancing solo, or when Jack Cole's choristers or the Kraft sisters are going through some interesting Cole patterns.

Some Lyrics Clever

But, being a big musical in a big theatre—the Adelphi, on 54th St.—it might have had some music. The tunes, by Don Walker and Baldwin Bergersen, certainly won't offend anybody, but they are the in-one-ear-out-the-other type. The songs run heavily to lyrics by George Marion Jr., and once in a while one of these is clever, like Miss Walsh's "What's New in New York." But the supposedly "big" numbers, like "Let's Go Too Far" or "Secret Song," are just yawns.

The plot of "Allah Be Praised" can be completely outlined in four words—"Let's go to Persia." Somebody says that in the prologue, so—whoosh, with the speed of a stagehand we go to Persia, and, of course, we land in a harem, where all the girls have bare bellies and bouncing bottoms. The emir of this harem is Mr. Hoysradt, and the situation seems to have stunned him.

Joey Faye Works Hard

Little Joey Faye, a good burlesque comedian, works manfully with too little to do. Working with him sometimes is Jayne Manners, who is probably the most beautiful tall girl in the world or the tallest beautiful girl,

I forget which. Every time she swishes a bare thigh at Mr. Faye I bet Alexander Calder's mobiles quiver over at the Museum of Modern Art.

Edward Roecker, cast as a Texas senator for no helpful reason, handles the baritone department well, but the movies' Patricia Morison is a disappointment. Her voice is small and, though her beauty is warm, her manner is cold.

NEW YORK NEWSPAPER PM
April 21, 1944

Lots of Harem, Little Fun

By LOUIS KRONENBERGER

ALLAH be praised, if you like, but just what for it would not be easy to say. There are some nice performers in Mr. Bloomingdale's new musical, some nice costumes, and a nice song and dance or two; but beyond that the show is pretty much of a cipher. The foundations simply aren't there, not to speak of the frills. Once again musical comedy is trying to get by on humdrum music and painful comedy. And *Allah Be Praised!* doesn't even cover up with zip and high spirits, with a shiny look and a slashing pace. Now and again something pleasant happens—Mary Jane Walsh sings a song, or Anita Alvarez or Milada Mladova does a dance. Otherwise everybody seems either adrift or muscle-bound — particularly the comics. Joey Faye can be one of the pleasantest guys in the trade; but his comic gifts are worse than wasted in *Allah Be Praised!*; they're simply thrown to the wolves.

The book in particular is a towering liability. It has to do with a Dartmouth man who went to Persia as a tutor and wound up as an emir, with a vast harem composed exclusively of American girls. As an idea this is probably no worse than several others I can remember, and it leads to nothing more suggestive than anyone would suppose; but it leads to nothing in the least lively or even remotely funny. There isn't a good line in the show.

• • •

As for the tunes, Miss Walsh has a couple which suit her lively manner—*Persian Way of Life* and *What's New in New York;* and there's an agreeable enough romantic one called *Let's Go Too Far.* The others just don't register. The dancing has moments of life and color, but moments only.

John Hoysradt plays the Emir, and has to play him straight; he can do in Persia few of the things he does in the Persian Room. Patricia Morison and Edward Roecker handle the romantic tunes, which they sing well enough but quite without personality. Personality, indeed, is at a great premium in *Allah Be Praised!*, which has been expensively put together but speedily falls apart.

NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE
April 21, 1944

Harum-Scarum

By HOWARD BARNES

A BIG noisy musical show has taken possession of the Adelphi Theater. "Allah Be Praised!" is dressed to kill, but it rarely succeeds in going anywhere. There are few moments of distinction in this Alfred Bloomingdale extravaganza. It is content with old jokes, rather tired tunes and conventional hoofing. Whatever satire was intended by a plot which has a lady Senator seeking refuge in an Emir's palace in 1948 is difficult to discover. It would be fairest to set down the piece as a vernal outburst, which will probably do very well with a slap-happy theater-going public.

At its best, the production is exuberant, in both performance and design. While there are no outstanding stars involved in the proceedings, such crafty nonsense-makers as John Hoysradt, Mary Jane Walsh and Joey Fay contribute beguiling moments to the entertainment. Edward Roecker sings the two best numbers of the show agreeably and Milada Mladova pirouettes in the ballet interlude, which has become a stock constituent of musical comedy since Agnes De Mille skipped standard high-stepping in "Oklahoma!" The ensemble dancing has been nicely staged by Jack Cole and the orchestra works overtime.

• • •

What is chiefly lacking in "Allah Be Praised!" is wit and melodic eloquence. The George Marion Jr. book is merely a makeshift for a pretentious romp, turning loose some typical Americans in a Persian harem for no very ascertainable reason and having the Emir himself kid radio commentators when the comic invention runs thin. Miss Walsh may be taking off a particular lady solon in her peculiar role, but she is neither caustic nor funny. She is better when she is mocking a Hollywood glamour girl, in a scene which has no relation to the piece as a whole. In "Let's Go Too Far" and "Secret Song," Don Walker and Baldwin Bergersen have written passable songs. Most of the music is very ordinary.

• • •

Hoysradt, after having to handle considerable dull chitchat in the opening stanza, is fine when he takes off Kaltenborn, Swing and Heatter. At least he hops up a lagging climax to the show. Anita Alvarez does a rather smooth bit of slow-motion pantomime when she is supposed to be participating in a harem soft-ball game, and the other performers plug away valiantly as though they were taking part in a superior song and dance show. "Allah Be Praised!" is far from that. It will have to depend for popular appeal on fancy furbishings, odd gags and general pandemonium.

NEW YORK SUN
April 21, 1944

'Allah Be Praised!' Costly but Unfunny, Opens at the Adelphi

By WARD MOREHOUSE

"ALLAH BE PRAISED!" an indifferent musical production, opened last night at the Adelphi Theater, rediscovered on West 54th Street. Alfred Bloomingdale, who produced it, has songs and dances and no book.

There are some excellent musical numbers, including "What's New in New York," put over by Mary Jane Walsh in her usual crisp and professional style, and "Katinka to Eva to Frances," sung by John Hoysradt and danced by Anita Alvarez, who was the "derby hat girl" in "Something for the Boys" last season. But when it comes to the book, there just isn't any.

If you're interested in the so-called story the numbers are strung to, it's something about a lend-lease harem in Persia after the war, all optimistically taking place in 1948. The Emir, of all people, is played by John Hoysradt, who manages to do several of his well-known night-club numbers with good effect, but having nothing whatsoever to do with the plot, which seems to center around a lady United States Senator, two brothers, one of them also a Senator, and the latter's sister, who is bent on becoming a member of the harem. There are also a couple of stooges named Sludge and McSlump. Now you go on from there.

Patricia Morison, who was so delightful in Marc Connelly's "The Two Bouquets" before she went to Hollywood, comes back to Broadway in the part of the lady Senator, and has, with Edward Roecker, two pleasant numbers, "Let's Go Too Far" and "Secret Song." She is lovely to look at but not particularly well cast in her present role.

Jack Cole, who is also remembered for his dance routines for "Something for the Boys," has done an excellent job of the choreography for "Allah Be Praised," especially in the satire in slow motion about a softball game, the aforementioned "Katinka to Eva to Frances." Besides Miss Alvarez, who does this one, Milada Mladova dances beautifully, and so do Sheila Bond and Beatrice and Evelyne Kraft.

The talented Miles White has done the costumes, but they are not up to some of his previous efforts, notably those for "Oklahoma," and George Jenkin's settings also fall below his usual high standard.

All in all, Mr. Bloomingdale apparently has spent a lot of money and time and effort, in the order named, on his first solo production, but George Marion Jr., who provided the book, didn't give him much to begin with and it looks as though he hasn't ended up with much more.

NEW YORK JOURNAL-AMERICAN
April 21, 1944

"Allah Be Praised!" Opens at the Adelphia

By ROBERT GARLAND

ALLAH having received his proper approbation in the title, there's little remaining to be praised in the extravaganza which came last night to the Adelphi. Once more the night clubs and the radio have joined forces and put on a show. Once more I wish they hadn't bothered. I'm still convinced that musical comedy is one thing, that night clubs and radio are two others.

In "Allah Be Praised," which is what the new arrival's called, there're 10 principals important enough to be listed in "Who's Who in the Cast." Of these, eight are from night clubs and radio. One is from pictures. The other is from ballet.

Although I've counted Mary Jane Walsh as a nightclubber—which is true—she graduated into musical comedy the hard way. First, a mortuarry in Davenport, Iowa. Then, the chorus of "I'd Rather Be Right." Later on a principal in that same show, as well as in "Sing Out the News," "Too Many Girls" and the "Allah Be Praised" from which I seem to have been diverted.

Please Don't Ask

If you're planning to write in and ask me what "Allah Be Praised" is all about, I wish you wouldn't. Frankly, I don't know. Even more frankly, I don't care. George Marion, Jr. has cooked up a preposterous plot in which several ladies of New York grow tired of it all and, banding themselves together, fly off to Persia. There, they attach themselves to the harem of a Mormon-minded Emir.

It's easy work, if you can get it. They get it! The energetic Emir has 365 wives, one for each day in the year. And there's an extra wife thrown in for leap year. For 1460 consecutive days, she's sitting pretty.

So it goes! There's a Receptionist mixed up in it, somehow. And a Cowboy called Tex O'Carroll. And an Abdul and Bulbul and a Tubaga; a Zarah and a Youssouf and a Marcia Mason Moore. Also a Mimi McSlump. How they get to Persia, what they do after they get there, I just don't remember. But I do remember that they make a lot of noise and have a darn good Teheranian time.

Meet Mr. Merlin

The best thing about "Allah Be Praised" at the Adelphi is the orchestra. Under the direction of Ving Merlin, who, now honorably discharged from the Army, once had something to do with the music of "Winged

Victory," the tunes composed by Baldwin Bergersen and Don Walker and orchestrated by Mr. Walker, sound even better than they are. Especially "Let's Go Too Far," derivative as it may be.

Next to the orchestra is the dancing. The dancing of Anita Alvarez and Mary McDonnell; of Sheila Bond and Pittman Corry; of Evelyne and Beatrice Kraft, and, especially of Milada Mladova, a Russian ballerina fresh from the steppes of Oklahoma City.

The others—topped, I shouldn't wonder, by Mary Jane Walsh as Carol O'Carroll; Edward Roecker as Tex O'Carroll and John Hoysradt as the Emir—work long and hard until along about eleven. Then, "Allah Be Praised" gives up trying to be a musical comedy, Mr. Hoysradt gives forth his imitations, the orchestra gives all it's got to give to "Let's Go Too Far," and the evening's over.

NEW YORK WORLD-TELEGRAM
April 21, 1944

Allah Be Praised! Takes Cue from Author's Other Play

By BURTON RASCOE

APPARENTLY George Marion, Jr., when assigned by Alfred Bloomingdale to whip up the book and lyrics for a musical comedy with the composers, Don Walker and Baldwin Bergersen, thought that the best way to do it was to plagiarize from himself. So Allah Be Praised!, which opened at the Adelphi last night, is only another and very weak version of the idea, the situations and the gags of the musical comedy success, Early to Bed, of which Mr. Marion did the book and lyrics. The scene has been switched from Martinique to Persia and the "boarding school for young women" in Early to Bed has become a "Shangri La for lady pub crawlers, recuperating from the night club life of New York."

And, just to make it all the more certain that, when you are at the Adelphi, you will get the feeling that you have seen and heard all this before at the Broadhurst, the composers of Allah Be Praised! have introduced, into their two principal numbers, melodies which are very like the basic melodies of the refrains of two of the late Fats Waller's hit songs in Early to Bed.

Unlike most third-rate musical comedies, which drag during the first act and pick up in the second, Allah Be Praised! starts off with a bang, begins to drag just before the first finale, and goes completely to pieces in the second half of the show.

Test for Orchestra

First of all, the orchestra, under the direction of young Ving Merlin, lately of Winged Victory, is not tops in musical comedy orchestras (that honor is still held by Max Meth's organization), but it is an unusually good one; and the overture puts you in a happy mood of expectation. Then the first musical number is the best one of the whole evening. It is a thing called The Persian Way of Life, sung by Mary Jane Walsh and, when it works into the dance number staged by Jack Cole and featured by Anita Alverez, Mary McDonnell and ensemble, it becomes a hot swing composition of a very stirring and infectious kind.

Also in the first act is the funniest thing in the show which is almost entirely lacking in wit or humor, a burlesque on the intimate night clubs of New York. It is so real you will say to yourself, "That's not exaggeration; it's understatement; I've seen scenes just like that, only worse or funnier, a dozen times." There's the tiny floor, the small tables crowded close together, the darkness and the blue baby spot, the small piano that is wheeled out, and the warbler herself trips on. She just gets started when a slightly edged patron makes his way to a table where a party is waiting for him and begins talking very loud and amiably, unaware that there is any entertainment going on and justifiably contemptuous of it when he discovers there is. This stunt is done by Mr. Hoysradt in a perfect characterization.

Credits Given

Next to the orchestra, however, I would say the best things about Allah Be Praised! are the costumes by Miles White, the scenery and lighting by George Jenkins, and the chorus, which is well-trained in some fetching choreography by Mr. Cole and made up of very pretty and shapely girls. . . . Next in the order of merit are Jayne Manners, the beautiful and amusing giantess; the tap dancing of a cutie named Sheila Bond; the burlesque of their own Cambodian dances by the lovely Kraft Sisters, who are not given as much of a chance as they deserve in the show; the toe dances of Milada Mladova; and the singing of What's New in New York, a fairly amusing catalogue, by Miss Walsh. I found Joey Faye much more tolerable than heretofore.

"Sheppey"

Play by W. Somerset Maugham; directed by Sir Cedric Hardwicke; settings by Watson Barratt. Presented by Jacques Chambrun at the Playhouse Theatre, April 18, 1944.

NEW YORK TIMES
April 19, 1944

Edmund Gwenn in the Leading Role of a Slowish Somerset Maugham Play Called 'Sheppey' Opening at the Playhouse

By LEWIS NICHOLS

A DECADE or so after it first was done in London, Somerset Maugham's "Sheppey" finally has wandered over the troubled waters to Broadway. In offering it last evening at the Playhouse, Jacques Chambrun has given it a pleasant cast, but neither he nor they have been able to change the fact our allies and ourselves do not always see eye-to-eye on the drama. For on this side the last play Mr. Maugham wrote before announcing his retirement from the theatre appears quiet and slow, with the aimlessness of a sleep-walker. It is not good Maugham save at intervals, and long and empty stretches are not good theatre—so far as New York is concerned, at least.

• • •

Calling his play "a portrait," Mr. Maugham has abandoned his usual characters and their fields of endeavor to write a parable. Sheppey of the title is a barber who holds a winning ticket on the Irish sweepstakes. After the celebration of his winning, he sees "a light" and decides to give his money away to the poor, following the teachings of Jesus. To follow the Gospels in a modern world leads Sheppey before the psychiatrists, his daughter hoping that he may be declared insane before he disgraces them all, his wife willing to let him do as he wishes. Before he can be certified, however, death comes to take him away.

It is possible that Mr. Maugham's use of various moods does not help the cohesion of his play. In the first part, which shows Sheppey at work and winning his money, the dialogue is light and the attitude is gay. Later, when Sheppey is discovering the difficulties of living by the Gospels, the irony often is labored and endless talk takes the place of action or new ideas. In the ending, when death comes in to settle the problem facing Sheppey's family, the mood is somber. Mr. Maugham takes no point of view about what changed Sheppey from a happy barber to a convert; for all he proves, the psychiatrists may have been right.

THE CAST

Albert	Harry Sothern
First Customer	Wallace Widdecombe
Miss Grange	Cathleen Cordell
Sheppey	Edmund Gwenn
Second Customer	Oswald Marshall
Mr. Bolton	Alexander Clark
Bradley	Gerald Savory
A Reporter	Cledge Roberts
Miss James	Vera Fuller Mellish
Bessie Legros	Doris Patston
A Strange Woman	Katherine Anderson
Mrs. Miller	Barbara Everest
Florrie	Frances Heflin
Ernest Turner	Anthony Kemble-Cooper
Dr. Jervis	Horace Cooper
Cooper	Victor Beecroft

The acting is deserving of a far better play. Edmund Gwenn has the title role and plays it so that Sheppey in his earlier career is charming. When the script does not leave him completely without help, he gives the part a bounce and good cheer, but it take more than even an excellent actor to fill a whole stage. Barbara Everest is Sheppey's wife, and she, also, does the role well. Frances Heflin makes an attractive daughter, Doris Patston has the part of a prostitute whom Sheppey befriends, and Horace Cooper, Anthony Kemble-Cooper, Gerald Savory and Harry Sothern are some of the others. Sir Cedric Hardwicke directed.

Mr. Maugham has given the theatre a good many excellent evenings; his latest one unfortunately is of a rank far below.

NEW YORK NEWSPAPER PM
April 19, 1944

Mr. Maugham in A Talky Mood

By LOUIS KRONENBERGER

SHEPPEY, which comes to Broadway 11 years after it was produced in London, reveals Mr. Maugham in a characteristic mood, but not a very inspired one. His tale of a London barber who wins a lot of money in a sweepstake and decides (to his family's horror) to give it to the poor, gives Mr. Maugham plenty of chance to indulge his cynicism and sense of irony. As a kind of intellectual exercise, *Sheppey* is certainly not without interest. As an opportunity for Ed-

mund Gwenn, it is not without its acting rewards. But all in all it is a pretty tired and pretty tiring play—too pat, too static, and entirely too talky.

The same day that Sheppey wins the sweepstakes he comes up against a lot of human misery. Moved by this to read his Bible, he is inspired to follow its teachings. He prepares to give away his money, and in the meantime brings home a streetwalker and a thief. The situation is not one that a Maugham is apt to be over-sentimenal about. Without being outstandingly crass, Sheppey's family regard a man who takes Jesus for his model as far more dangerous than anybody who would take Satan. Sheppey, they feel sure, must be deranged; and the medical profession, about whom Mr. Maugham is also not too polite, agrees. Mr. Maugham then throws in a further irony by having the thief and the prostitute say no thank you to Sheppey, and wander back where life is more exciting.

But the cream of Mr. Maugham's jest, his sad proof of the rarity of the true Christian, is that Sheppey really isn't well. All the time, he has been having hallucinations of a strange woman and the woman turns out to be Death. She comes, at the end, to claim him, recounting, among other things, that parable of the merchant of Bagdad that gave John O'Hara his title for *Appointment in Samarra*.

* * *

Mr. Maugham gets a bleak sort of fun out of all this, the fun of a man inveterately aware of human crassness and disingenuousness. He is not too hard on human nature; he is merely privy to it. He is sympathetic with Sheppey—it is enough to show that Sheppey is literally too good for this world. But the story seems charted, not created; the characters are all glibly drawn to order, and their talk is endless without being notably bright. *Sheppey* is too dry a play and dramatically too dull a one. It needs somebody like Shaw, who would have taken more licenses but added more lift; been more extravagant but more entertaining.

Mr. Gwenn plays Sheppey with considerable sympathy and skill but the part seems to me rather limited. Barbara Everest is quietly appealing as Sheppey's wife, and there are very nice performances by Cathleen Cordell, Frances Heflin, Gerald Savory, Anthony Kemble-Cooper and others. Sir Cedric Hardwicke's direction is careful and intelligent, but the play moves too slowly for all that.

NEW YORK DAILY NEWS
April 19, 1944

Edmund Gwenn Is Lovable in a Gently Funny 'Sheppey'

By JOHN CHAPMAN

IN SOMERSET MAUGHAM'S "Sheppey," the title character is so lovable, so gentle, so sweet that he is not right for this world, so Death comes and leads him away. It might also be said that the play itself is so lovable, so gentle and so sweet that Broadway's own grim reaper—a particularly unattractive Death and not at all like the handsome brunette who took Sheppey off—may come hanging around the Playhouse before it should.

I hope not, and right now I'm ashamed of myself for having this cynical attitude. There should be room in the theatre for a play like "Sheppey"—a modest, warming, talkative and funny story, with a wonderful performance by Edmund Gwenn. Its homeliness and its leisure are comforting—but Broadway today does not seem to have time for such qualities.

Gwenn's role is that of a London barber, pre-war (Maugham wrote the comedy for a London production in 1933) who wins 8,000 and some-odd pounds in the Irish sweeps. This will fix the jolly fellow, and his wife and his daughter, very comfortably—but he gets a notion.

A Lucky Barber

Sheppey, a good barber who likes all kinds of people, decides he'd better help out the poor. He'll give a bob here and a pound there whenever he sees someone he's sorry for. As a starter he brings into his astonished home a tart and a sneak thief. After a week or so these sinners can't stand any more dull goodness and they leave Sheppey, with thanks. He doesn't hold it against them. They are welcome back any time.

This Christlike attitude sets his family to worrying about his mental health. He's already had a couple of heart attacks, and now they think he may be potty as well. A psychiatrist confirms their fears. This chap, who believes that philanthropy is a form of insanity, recommends that Sheppy be put in an asylum; but Death—a handsome, gentle woman—leads him away. He dies lucky just as he'd lived lucky.

Direction by Hardwicke

Gwenn, a master at middle-class British geniality, is delightful. He's an amusing barber at work in the first act, and in the two scenes of the second and final act he's a lovable family man possessed of a strange inner glow which disturbs everybody but him. Barbara Everest, as his wife; Doris Patston, as the tart; Frances Heflin, as the daughter, and Anthony Kemble-Cooper as the daughter's pompous fiance, are all first-rate—and so are the others in the company.

Sir Cedric Hardwicke, himself an actor who knows the uses of economy and understatement, has directed "Sheppey" and made it quietly human. I hope the comedy jogs along for a long time, for Maugham's chuckling amusement at human frailties is contagious.

NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE
April 19, 1944

Master Barber, Dull Razor

By HOWARD BARNES

W SOMERSET MAUGHAM refers to "Sheppey" as a portrait. It is far more that than it is a play. Even as a straight character study of an eccentric barber, the Playhouse offering is blurred. It starts in as a Cockney comedy, with a nice old codger hitting the jackpot on a sweepstakes ticket. Before you know it it has become a religious parable, with the former shave and a haircut expert emulating the gospel, of all things. In the end it goes mystical and murky as the subject of the portrait has a rendezvous with death. Maugham could have found no better player to interpret his work than Edmund Gwenn, but even the star's brilliance does not keep it in a dramatic frame.

* * *

This is not a new Maugham play. It was first done in London a decade ago and it had subsequent showings on the Continent. It is difficult to see why Jacques Chambrun should have considered a local presentation at this late date. There is undoubtedly the stuff of an engaging show in "Sheppey," but not in the bifurcated form it has on Forty-eighth Street. As it stands, a gay first act, filled with wonderful characters and comic eloquence, is resolved in a deal of baffling and wearisome nonsense. The laughter runs dry like a shallow well in a drought and there is nothing of genuine significance to take its place. The newly rich barber, intent on giving his windfall to the needy, does not even achieve a new concept of his family or the world.

* * *

What makes the final scenes of "Sheppey" particularly exasperating is the fact that Maugham surrounds his central portrait with some rather fascinating line drawings and then does nothing with them. The barber's wife, played by Barbara Everest, is the best of the lot, as she placidly accepts his decision to become a philanthropist. A streetwalker, a sneak thief, the self-seeking daughter of Sheppey and her intolerable fiance, and ultimately death herself wander about the stage, promising all sorts of dramatic twists. No twist occurs, unles you count a windy recitation of the appointment in Samarra legend. Maugham has written little more than a one-act description of a Bond Street tonsorial parlor.

* * *

That act is uttterly delightful. With Gwenn doing a triumphant job with a razor, a subtle sales talk and an impromptu champagne party when he hears of his good luck, "Sheppey" is an infectious lampoon. The actor is left kicking his heels in the subsequent scenes. Doris Patston has some vivid moments as the prostitute, who misses her profession when Sheppey takes her in. Anthony Kemble-Cooper is completely obnoxious as the daughter's fiance and Katherine Anderson does what she can with the awkward role of death. Sir Cedric Hardwicke's staging is bound unalterably to the script. It is good at the start, but gets badly out of hand in the mystical aftermath. "Sheppey" pins an amusing character in a colorful tableau and then lets him get away like one of those portraits which are forever climbing out of their frames in the funny papers.

NEW YORK JOURNAL-AMERICAN
April 19, 1944

'Sheppey' Revival At the Playhouse

By ROBERT GARLAND

BOTH as a character and a play "Sheppey" was a long time dying last evening at the Playhouse. But, around about 11 (although it seemed a whole lot later), the two of them passed on and out together. It was better so; far, far better. They hadn't been happy, either of them, with one foot in the grave and the other on the stage of Mr. Brady's charming little theatre.

Sheppey, the character, and "Sheppey," the play have been haunting the English-speaking theatre for more than a decade. They began in London, back in 1933, with Ralph Richardson as the boresome barber of Bond Street. They ended (I hope!) in New York, up in 1944, with Edmund Gwenn in the selfsame windy role.

Why Jacques Chambrun (whoever he is?) revived "Sheppey" I'll never know. Why Somerset Maugham (distinguished author!) permitted him to do so must remain a mystery. Why Edmund Gwenn (talented actor!) consented to play the title part, he alone can tell. But I am able to assure you that three such enigmatic errors fall woefully to add up to a happy evening in anybody's showshop.

Boresome Barber

At any rate, Sheppey is a barber, the boresome barber of Bond Street, of whom I've written. He's as cute as cute can be around the shop, selling bottles of Number Three Hair-Restorer to bald and unbald alike; carrying on a continuous conversation as he does so. It's dullish clatter-clatter, and you're glad when an unappreciative customer tells him to shut up and get on with his shaving.

Sheppey shuts up. But not for long. How can he when, right in the middle of his beard-scraping he wins the Irish Sweepstakes and falls heir to eight thousand pounds in Bank of England money? Still talking, Sheppey leaves for his house in Camberwell. Death, who is a lady, leaves with him.

For no good reason made manifest by Mr. Maugham, Sheppey decides to turn Christ-like on his family; to faithfully follow the New Testament and give his race-track riches to the poor, the unworthy and the unfit. So, being too good for this world, Lady Death comes to Camberwell to fetch him, wearing a tweed suit, a red muffler and a smuggish sort of smile.

There, without unnecessary detail, you have it. You're welcome to it, as far as I'm concerned. Admiring "Our Betters," "The Circle" and "The Constant Wife" no end, I could have gotten along without "Sheppey" quite happily. But, having seen and heard it, I pass it on to you. Maybe you'll like it more than I do. I sincerely hope so. It just can't be as dull as it seems to me.

Edmund Gwenn, one of the best (as "Laburnum Grove," "The Wookey" and Katharine Cornell's revival of "The Three Sisters" prove!) works hard and honestly as the hot-towel man. Nothing but inertia comes of it. A conversational hair-clipper such as he could never clip hair.

Under Sir Cedric Hardwicke's fresh-from-Hollywood direction, Mr. Gwenn's supporting cast does little to support him. Anthony Kemble-Cooper, "member of an old English stage family," fumbles smokelessly with a pipe. Katherine Anderson is "a strange woman" who turns out to be Lady Death. But why go on? . . . The playwright says that "Sheppey" is "a portrait." And we'd all gone to see a play.

NEW YORK POST
April 19, 1944

Somerset Maugham's 'Sheppey' a Wordy but Often Biting Satire

By WILELLA WALDORF

IT IS EASY to pick flaws in Somerset Maugham's "Sheppey," produced last night at the Playhouse. Written in the early thirties, at the height of the depression, it sometimes sounds a trifle out of date. It is leisurely. There is very little action and a good deal of talk. Some of the talk is dull.

Having duly picked a few flaws, we now urge you to see "Sheppey," for a variety of reasons.

Mr. Maugham calls his play "a portrait" and he is picturing what happens when a Bond Street barber wins a sweepstakes prize and decides to share it with people less well off than himself, instead of buying a country cottage, getting his wife a maid to help with the housework, or helping his selfish young daughter marry the insufferable snob of a school-master to whom she is engaged.

Sheppey, in other words, has taken to reading the Bible and has some idea of trying to do as Jesus would have done. That one can't carry on like that nowadays and expect anybody to put up with it very long soon becomes uncomfortably evident.

They Call Him Mad

Of course Sheppey, being a simple sort of fellow who has never gone in for this sort of thing before, begins rather crudely and tentatively by taking into his home a prostitute he knows who is down on her luck, and a petty thief caught lifting an overcoat.

This does not go down well with Sheppey's family and neither does his decision to give his money to the poor instead of to them. They decide he's potty, especially since he's had a couple of strokes and taken to seeing a mysterious woman around the house who is invisible to everybody else.

After the young schoolmaster who expects to become Sheppey's son-in-law has smugly explained that anybody who doesn't think and act just like everybody else is obviously insane —"that's Democracy!"—the medicos come into the picture, and we'll give you just one guess what their verdict is.

In the meantime the petty thief has decided that Sheppey is as balmy as they come, after he is given the silver snuff box he had gone to a lot of trouble to steal. The prostitute is more sympathetic with her host's peculiar ways than any of the others but she's bored stiff in Camberwell and pining to get back to the excitement of the West End and her regular beat.

Mr. Maugham's Lip Curls

All this sounds pretty obvious and not very pleasant, but it is set forth with a fine display of cynicism and bitterly ironic comment by Mr. Maugham, who looks upon the human race with a sort of tolerant disgust. As Sheppey endeavors in his lowly way to emulate the teachings of Christ, the author records the reactions of his friends and relatives mercilessly, his lip curling with contempt.

We found Mr. Maugham's second act, well loaded with satire, sufficiently biting to render "Sheppey" stimulating drama, and since the first act (there are only two) is devoted chiefly to good old British fun in a West End barber shop, it turns out to be well worth seeing and listening to.

This is especially true when you consider the fact that Edmund Gwenn's performance in the title role is a little masterpiece of portraiture, that Doris Patston brings remarkable vitality and warmth to that old stock figure, the stage prostitute; that Anthony Kemble-Cooper portrays the educated son-in-law almost too realistically to be borne, and that Sir Cedric Hardwicke has deftly directed a careful production, expertly designed by Watson Barratt and equipped with a large number of excellent actors in good character parts.

NEW YORK WORLD-TELEGRAM
April 19, 1944

Maugham's New Play Sheppey Based on Religious Theme

By BURTON RASCOE

FOR some time now W. Somerset Maugham has been preoccupied with the problem of good and evil, with the essence of what we call the natural and the supernatural, in short, with religion. His new novel, The Razor's Edge, which will be published tomorrow, I think will surprise and puzzle as well as fascinate and disturb most of his literary following.

Maugham's play, Sheppey, which was produced at the Playhouse last night, reflects a phase of his philosophical inquiry which antedated what, for want of a better term, I can only describe as the mystic nihilism of The Razor's Edge, and, as such, represents, I believe, Maugham's initial steps in his own religious inquiry and experience. As a product of his first inquiries, it has to do, naturally, with the religious beliefs, the social codes, the patterns of behavior and the heritage of what W. B. Yeats called "race memories" (which may be intuitions, intimations of immortality or plain superstitions) of the average, middle-class Englishman.

Sheppey is unsatisfacory theater. It is slow, often to the point of tediousness; it does not move in a straight line dramatically; it deals with two themes and is inconclusive about either of them; it starts many hares of thought by beating about the bush and does not pursue them. Therefore, except for the entertainment furnished by the amiable personality of Edmund Gwenn in what amounts to practically a monologue for three acts, I cannot recommend Sheppey as a pastime.

But, peace to the Fadimans and other Popular Front belittlers of Maugham as a facile and superficial purveyor of fiction without "social significance," Maugham is not only one of the greatest masters of English prose but a fictionist designed, I believe, to outlast Wells, Bennett, Galsworthy, Lawrence, Conrad or any other British novelist of his period. Therefore, whatever he has to say, even in as unsatisfactory a play as Sheppey, is said with such honesty, distinction and grace that it cannot be dismissed (by me) out of hand.

Sheppey, in the play, is a barber working in a shop patronized by the swells of Bond St., London, largely because of Sheppey's efficiency, sunny disposition and reputation as a "card." He has such faith in his luck that he is not (or pretends not to be) surprised to learn that he has won $40,000 on a sweepstakes ticket; for (he says) he made his plans for the purchase of a two-acre farm when he bought his ticket.

Sheppey's wife is a good cook and a fine woman whom Sheppey married while she was "in service," a fact which bothers neither Sheppey nor his wife but which their daughter wants kept secret lest it cause her young man to break off their engagement; for he is a school teacher and the son of a clerk, and school teachers and clerks are ever so much higher in the social scale in England than barbers and servants. Sheppey's sudden wealth removes whatever stigma the cliche-ridden young man attaches to the barber's trade, for it means (to him) that he can now groom himself for the premiership of Great Britain.

In His Steps

But Sheppey has a stroke before leaving the shop the night he learns of his good fortune and he is helped home by a street walker. Something happens to him after this experience. He gets an intimation that a "strange woman" (who turns out to be Death) is in his home; he turns to the Gospels and begins to obey the precepts of Jesus literally, planning to give away all he has to the poor and bringing in a street walker and a pickpocket to live in his home.

This is plain insanity, as everybody (especially street walkers and pickpockets) know; and Sheppey is about to be committed to an asylum when he falls asleep, has a talk with Death and is led by her into the Unknown. . . . That's all. To enjoy the play you must bring more to it, I believe, than Maugham is willing to put into it. . . . No one besides Mr. Gwenn has a chance to get his, or her, teeth into the other roles; but the cast, directed by Sir Cedric Hardwicke, is good, especially Barbara Everest, Anthony Kemble-Cooper and Doris Patston.

NEW YORK SUN
April 19, 1944

Edmund Gwenn Plays the Title Role in 'Sheppey,' Done at Playhouse, With Skill.

By WARD MOREHOUSE

A STRANGE, frequently fascinating and well-acted play, W. Somerset Maugham's "Sheppey," was performed last night upon the stage of the Playhouse by Edmund Gwenn and an excellent cast. Done in London eleven years ago, this piece is now brought to Broadway by Jacques Chambrun and it is staged by Sir Cedric Hardwicke with great attention to detail.

"Sheppey" is a mingling of realism and fantasy. There are many talky and plodding moments, but the redeeming finish is beautifully played by Mr. Gwenn and Katherine Anderson. Mr. Gwenn, contributing his best work in the local theater to date, comes through with a warming characterization all the way.

Sheppey is a gentle London barber, quite content with his employment in Bradley's friendly shop in London's Bond Street and with his middle-class home life at Camberwell, London. Life is simple for him until he wins £3,500 in the Irish sweepstakes. Mr. Maugham's second act is devoted to Sheppey's efforts to live as Jesus did, and the effect his trying to live according to the doctrines of the Bible has on his family and those about him.

Sheppey is considered balmy, but before they can commit him to an institution death

comes along in the person of a lovely young woman, played by Katherine Anderson.

Mr. Gwenn plays Sheppey with tremendous skill. There are also good performances from Barbara Everest, Frances Heflin and Doris Patston as the prostitute brought into Sheppey's home. Watson Barratt has provided two first-rate settings, the entire first act being the barbershop and the second Sheppey's living room.

"Sheppey" is an absorbing play for most of the evening. Mr. Maugham is welcomed back to the Broadway theater. But most of the honors, to my notion, belong to Edmund Gwenn.

"Sheppey" gives Mr. Brady's Playhouse stronger and more thoughtful fare than it has had in some time.

"Pretty Little Parlor"

Play by Claiborne Foster; directed by Ralph Bellamy; setting by Stewart Chaney. Presented by John Moses and Mr. Bellamy at the National Theatre, April 17, 1944.

NEW YORK WORLD-TELEGRAM
April 18, 1944

Pretty Little Parlor Looks Like Real Hit

By BURTON RASCOE

IF Sidney Blackmer had beaten Stella Adler to death with a poker in full view of the audience during the third act of Pretty Little Parlor, I think any jury picked out of the audience at the National last night would have brought in a quick verdict of justifiable homicide and I would have liked the play even better than I did. As it is, Claiborne Foster, the author of this scarifying study in female ruthlessness and viciousness, lets Clotilde Hilyard (Miss Adler) off with no more than a sentence to a miserable and lonely life devoted to polite blackmail; and that is simply a deplorably disappointing miscarriage of justice by any standards, theatrical or ethical.

All this is by way of saying that, in my book, from here on Miss Adler is one of our First Actresses—an artist who has shown by the variety of the role she has sustained, particularly this one, that she is primarily an actress and not a mere stage personality of the kind that the more they change their roles the more their projections remain the same thing. In her characterization of Clotilde Hilyard you forget Miss Adler two seconds after she appears on the stage and begin to hate the person she represents. She is sly; she is false; she is nasty-nice, cruelly selfish, scheming, knowing as a snake, sexy, vibrant with feline self-confidence; she is alive, real and intensely hateful. . . . In other words, Miss Adler is superb—the worthy daughter of her famous actor father, Jacob Adler.

Time: 1905

It is not a nice story that Miss Foster offers in Pretty Little Parlor, but if the term, "social significance," has any meaning, the play has more social significance than all the plays of the Odets', Spewacks, Lawsons, et al., of the Popular Front brigade put together; for it is an honest and bitter arraignment of a degrading set of values which very generally obtained around the turn of the century (the time of this play is 1905) and which persists to a very unhealthy degree even at the present time. It is a set of values deriving from a people's making a god of money.

The Clotilde of Miss Foster's play should have been a man. If she had been, she might have been a Gould, a Frick, a Hill, and her ruthless energy, ingenious talent for scheming trickery and her organizing ability might have been of great ultimate value in the development of the country; but, being a woman, she had to channel her ruthless energy into social ambitions; and, being a female who married for money a man who lost his inherited wealth (in one of the recurrent panics of Wall Street's heydey) she devoted her devious and tricky mind to what she believed to be the work of promoting her husband with all the wiles of an accomplished and heartless courtesan—to the cruel sacrifice of every decency in human relations.

THE CAST

Jefferson Hilyard	Sidney Blackmer
Anastasia	Marilyn Erskine
Dora	Joan Tetzel
Henry	Mel Roberts
Clotilde	Stella Adler
Mr. Kennedy	Paul Parks
Dennis Baldwin	Kip Good
Mr. Jonas	Edward Begley

She drove her weak and slavish husband to alcoholism; she sacrificed the happiness of her step-daughter to advance a scheme to marry her own 16-year-old daughter (whose mind she had fiendishly warped) to a rich young man in order that she might control them both; she seduced (in a perfectly "moral" way) a fatuous dub of a vice president of a railroad but to no purpose, for the president was just as callous, just as hard as she was and threw the vice president out on his ear and she tried to seduce the president only to find he would use her only on his own indelicate terms.

This is the third play produced within a few weeks in which the theme is that of the dominating female, the others being The House in Paris, which failed, and the current Only the Heart, which seems to be turning into a well-deserved success. Only the Heart is, essentially more naturalistic, more credible than Pretty Little Parlor, but it has nothing like the dramatic intensity of the latter.

Mr. Blackmer, as the gentle and pathetic weakling, tied by a physical enslavement to a vampire, is at once very appealing and very real. Edward Begley, as the uncut diamond, is an admirable counterfoil to Miss Adler. Lovely Joan Tetzel, as the stepdaughter, shows another advancement on the road to becoming an important actress with a touching characterization of a submissive young woman who finally revolts. Marilyn Erskine, a pretty child, was a perfect choice for the role of the 16-year-old baby, emotionally and mentally warped by her mother. And Kip Good, Paul Parks and Mel Roberts complete an excellent cast, skillfully directed by Ralph Bellamy. Setting by Stewart Chaney and costumes by Paul duPont help mightily to increase the illusion in what looks like a solid hit.

NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE
April 18, 1944

Fails the Actors

By HOWARD BARNES

A VENOMOUS woman is dissected rather clumsily in "Pretty Little Parlor." The chief character in Claiborne Foster's play is as rapacious and evil as Regina Giddens of "The Little Foxes." What is wanting is a play of scope and dramatic depth to afford a fulcrum for her fearsome activities. In spite of some excellent acting, the National Theater offering spends an unconscionable time getting almost nowhere. For one scene of morbid psychological power there a dozen dreary passages in which melodramatic cliches are accompanied by painfully inept dialogue.

• • •

It must be admitted that the author took on a large assigment in her first play. She has turned a spotlight on an unhappy family, living in a small town hotel in 1905, which is doomed to destruction by a bitter and self-centered matron. To her great credit she has fused her material in an interlude of fine intensity, when a young girl sees her monstrous step-mother as she really is, but there is a lot of backing and filling before the play catches fire briefly. Most of the situations are contrived. The conflict of characters, in which the melodramatic horror of the theme should have resided, is generally as black and white as in a dime novel.

• • •

The players deserve far more subtlety in dramatic design and speech than they are granted in "Pretty Little Parlor." Stella Adler pulls everything, including a fit of hysterics, in an attempt to realize the central role. Having driven her weak husband to drink, she blocks the marriage of her step-daughter in order that her own child may snare an eligible bachelor. She uses her middle-aged charms to meddle in her husband's affairs with his superiors. Even though she gets her come-uppance in the end, she has little genuine significance. She represents neither a period product nor the warped result of her own evil scheming.

• • •

In the same manner Sidney Blackmer gives a singularly knowing and sympathetic portrayal of the defeated husband, without ever having the chance to come to grips with the plot. As a matter of fact, he gets whisked out of the proceedings in an off-stage accident. Miss Adler and Blackmer do wonders with what they have at hand. Joan Tetzel is even better than they in her moment of ultimate rebellion. Ralph Bellamy's staging is adequate, while Stewart Chaney's set is appropriately ugly. "Pretty Little Parlor" has all the externals of a morbid, melodramatic character study, but it has next to no theatrical dimension.

NEW YORK TIMES
April 18, 1944

The Wayward on Stage

By LEWIS NICHOLS

IT IS quite apparent that Claiborne Foster, the actress, has an opinion of the human race which is slightly lower than that usually credited to Satan. In her new play, "Pretty Little Parlor," she has filled the stage of the National with as pretty a collection of the wayward as the season thus far has looked upon. An honest report this morning suggests, however, that she also has filled the stage with a great deal of sound and fury, signifying just what it does in the quotation. All of them were hard at work being disagreeable last evening, but all of

them were not able to keep "Pretty Little Parlor" from being tedious, sometimes ridiculous, and always in the mood of ten-twent'-thirt', which needed only peanuts in the balcony to be the breath of an earlier day.

* * *

If it is the spider who lures the fly into the pretty little parlor, Miss Foster's is the blackest of black widows. Clotilde has a husband who is a drunkard and it was she who made him that. Clotilde has a stepdaughter who at the beginning is in the next thing to bondage, and she was responsible. Clotilde has a daughter of sixteen who, under her mother's earnest teaching, gets her stepsister's beau away from her. Clotilde tries to lure busy railroad executives into giving her husband new and better jobs, and flirtatious is the name for Clotilde while she is doing so. Clotilde is selfish, unreasonable—and, it is to be feared, not a little unreal. Miss Foster has built her chief character into such a horror that she topples over into parody.

When Miss Foster finished making Clotilde a sound five-letter word, Stella Adler stepped in to touch it up, and she obviously is having a field day. The fact that she cannot make the part real no doubt lies in the writing, for no one can say that Miss Adler does not try. She is all over the stage, harassed, moaning, vicious in turn. A great deal of energy is being put forth at the National. Sidney Blackmer is the drunken husband, and Marilyn Erskine and Joan Tetzel are the two girls. Their roles are of more nearly normal human beings, and they make out better with them. Edward Begley is one of the railroad magnates, and while the part is a caricature, Mr. Begley does not concede that for a moment.

* * *

Being mainly a character study, "Pretty Little Parlor" does not concern itself too much with plot, and it cheats to the extent that all the action takes place off stage. It would have been nice, for example, to see the drunken husband and his daughter drown on a fishing trip, because Clotilde hadn't kept the whiskey away from him; it would have been lively to see Clotilde making up to her son-in-law at the time of her daughter's funeral. Perhaps one of the minor difficulties of the play is that it remains too close to the parlor, even though Stewart Chaney has designed a good parlor and Paul du Pont has created excellent costumes to dress it up. "Pretty Little Parlor" is empty of all but words.

NEW YORK NEWSPAPER PM
April 18, 1944

A Bit Too Bad To Be True

By LOUIS KRONENBERGER

IN *Pretty Little Parlor,* Claiborne Foster has cooked up one of the richest messes of gumbo in many a moon. Into it have gone most of the ingredients of a whole gaslit era of the drama, including the language. It's almost a virtue. If plays are to be bad, they might as well be bad in the grand style.

Miss Foster's Clotilde Hilyard is quite a creation. Set beside her, all the scheming, ambitious, greedy, heartless heroines of drama and fiction, from Mr. Thackeray's Becky to Miss Hellman's Regina, are mere Sunday-school teachers. Clotilde literally drives her husband to drink, and not too indirectly to his death. With him, morever, perishes their daughter. The lady also robs her stepdaughter of all her beaux; she wheedles, coaxes, threatens and cajoles railroad executives in order to advance the family fortunes; and she winds up selling information to the only character in the world who is possibly tougher than she is. And in moments of relaxation, she draws herself up and roundly denounces anyone in sight, usually for being vulgar.

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Lady vipers are very often, of course, a definite attraction in the theater; but Clotilde is a bit thick. Not that she's repellent; she's merely ridiculous. She not only keeps her wiles working overtime, but there is something more than a little obvious about them. Furthermore, since Miss Foster goes in for a certain stateliness of language, large parts of *Pretty Little Parlor* seem to be played on a high wire.

To Stella Adler has fallen Clotilde's bountiful role, and it is written with so much schmaltz that Miss Adler can't be blamed too much for giving it plenty of pedal. It must have been fun to do and it was fun to watch. Sidney Blackmer played the browbeaten husband with the proper meekness of a mouse in the presence of a tiger. Marilyn Erskine made a submissive daughter and Joan Tetzel a scornful stepdaughter; while Edward Begley went at the tough guy with a fine allotuness. Stewart Chaney has done a nice period set (the time is 1905) and Paul DuPont has dressed up the ladies in style.

NEW YORK DAILY NEWS
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Stella Adler Portrays A Female Terror in 'Pretty Little Parlor'

By JOHN CHAPMAN

I REMEMBER Claiborne Foster as an attractive, able actress—but within herself she must be a holy terror and don't ever let her get sore at you. When she was writing her play, "Pretty Little Parlor," she became angry at a character, and the more she wrote the more she took it out on the poor woman.

The result, which was displayed at the National Theatre last night, is practically a solo performance in bitchery on the part of Stella Adler. No female has been so relentlessly treated by a playwright since Lillian Hellman wrote "The Little Foxes" for Tallula Bankhead. Miss Adler, in a Gibson Girl getup, is quite magnificent as a peculiarly hellish matriarch, but Miss Foster's play wore me down.

The writing is clear and effective some of the time, but at other times it is wordy and uninspired. The plot does not have enough tensile strength to hold three acts together, so the last half of the last acts drops off and lies there, limp. It ends only when Miss Foster can't think of any more waspish tortures to inflict upon her character.

An Early Milquetoast

Miss Adler enacts the role of one Clotilde Hilyard, who runs a husband, a daughter and a stepdaughter in a small town in 1905. The husband—Sidney Blackmer, looking like a meek Teddy Roosevelt and acting most appealingly—has long given up trying to get somewhere as a railroad executive. He contents himself with being henpecked, adoring his monumental wife in a doglike fashion, and getting drunk.

The wife maneuvers like a general, schemes like a homesick convict. She jockeys stepdaughter out of a good marriarge and moves her own daughter into the spot; she tries to win friends and influence people for the purpose of improving her husband's job. When husband and daughter drown in an accident it looks as though she might be down for a while, but she isn't. She pops right up and makes a smart financial deal.

You can't love such a character, or even admire it; you can only be appalled. There is no law against appalling an audience, but a play must be uncommonly strong to get away with it, and I don't think Miss Foster has turned the trick.

The casting is well done. Marilyn Erskine and Joan Tetzel are an attractive pair of girls. Kip Good figures pleasingly as a young suitor, Edward Begley is interesting as a roughneck railroader and Paul Parks, peering genially from behind a big beard, appears briefly as a 1905-model executive. Ralph Bellamy directed. It's Miss Adler's play.

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'Pretty Little Parlor' Opens at the National

By ROBERT GARLAND

ACTRESS-PLAYWRIGHT Ruth Gordon, having turned her hand to comedy, it is no more than natural that Actress-playwright Claiborne Foster, another of the theatre's more gifted girls, should turn her hand to tragedy. Miss Foster's wrathful melodrama showed up last night at the National, sponsored by John Moses and Ralph Bellamy, newcomers in the play-producing field. Here's good luck to them. But not just yet, I fear.

Without paralleling it in too obvious a way, "Pretty Little Parlor" brings Lillian Hellman's "The Little Foxes" constanty to mind. Of course, the theatre may have something to do with the suggestion. But not entirely! Each play has to do with a calculating female who ought to be ashamed. But who isn't. And never will be.

Even so, Miss Hellman's Regina Giddens and Miss Foster's Clotilde Hilyard are sisters both over and under the skin. Only the present nuisance at the National is even more despicable than the former, which, if I may say so, is carrying female despicability to a dangerously dislikable degree. As wife and mother, Clotilde should be tossed a poisoned bone. In a way, she is.

Interest Lags

Clotilde Hilyard is the Regina Giddens of Miss Foster's play. The dominating head of the mixed-up, unhappy Hilyard tribe, she is ruthless, ambitious and protective, driving her husband to drink, his daughter by a former marriage to work, her own daughter to matrimony and herself to distraction. Off-stage and on, I don't know when I've met so persistently unpleasant a female. There's but one word for her.

For two of the three acts, I sat expectantly on the edge of my chair, waiting for one of her family worms to turn. I had my hopes on her husband. But he turned to drink instead, drowning himself off-shore and taking his recently married daughter down to Davy Jones' locker with him.

After that, my first and second act interest kind of lagged. So does the play. With papa gone and practically forgotten, "Pretty Little Parlor" turns to low and high finance, with mamma, who should have stood in jail, falling heir to the tidy sum of $5,000, with hopes held out for a rich and equally rough and ruthless husband. Whatever Clotilde gets, it's too good for her.

Blackmer Superb

Right now, it seems to me that "Pretty Little Parlor" is more of a series of well-drawn character sketches than a well-constructed play. And it is as such that Ralph Bellamy, co-producer with John Moses, has directed it in front of a single Stewart Chaney setting. Clotilde versus her husband, Jefferson. Clotilde versus her husband's daughter, Dora. Clotilde versus her own daughter, Anastasia.

For the greater part of the evening, Stella Adler has almost everything her own way. As the Big Black Spider suggested by the title, Miss Adler has herself a time. She's good at it, too. If her louse-like head of the house of Hilyard were any more obnoxious, the audience itself would rise up and slay her.

But, to my way of thinking, it is the superb portrait of Clotilde's unhappy husband, Jefferson, that gives "Pretty Little Parlor"